

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 6834

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As Reported By Senate Committee On:  
Agriculture & Rural Economic Development, February 07, 2008

**Title:** An act relating to special assessments for conservation districts in counties having a population between seven hundred seventy-five thousand and one million five hundred thousand persons.

**Brief Description:** Regarding special assessments for certain conservation districts.

**Sponsors:** Senators Rasmussen and Kastama.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Agriculture & Rural Economic Development: 1/31/08, 2/7/08 [DP].

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**Majority Report:** Do pass.

Signed by Senators Rasmussen, Chair; Hatfield, Vice Chair; Schoesler, Ranking Minority Member; Jacobsen, Morton and Shin.

**Staff:** Bob Lee (786-7404)

**Background:** In 1989, a process was established to allow funds to be generated for programs and activities provided by conservation districts by establishing special assessments on lands within the districts. The process is initiated by a conservation district board, which holds a public hearing on a proposal. On or before August 1 in the year prior to which it is proposed that special assessments be collected, the conservation district may file a proposed system of special assessments and a proposed budget with the county legislative authority. The county legislative authority is required to hold a public hearing and then may accept or modify the proposal. To establish special assessments, the county legislative authority must find that the public interest will be served and that special assessments imposed on any land will not exceed the special benefit that the land will receive. The maximum rate of assessment is ten cents per acre or five dollars per parcel, or both. Such assessments may continue for a period of up to ten years. In 2005, counties with a population over 1.5 million the maximum assessment rate was increased to ten dollars per parcel.

**Summary of Bill:** Until January 1, 2013, counties with a population of between 775,000 and 1.5 million (Pierce County) may increase the assessment to \$10 per parcel. A written report is to be provided to the legislature by December 1, 2011 that summarizes how the district allocated its funds by category, including, but not limited to, salmon habitat, water quality,

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forestry, noncommercial agriculture and commercial agriculture. To continue the assessment at the \$10 level after 2012 will require additional legislative action.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: Commercial agriculture in Pierce County is in seriously bad shape. The conservation district is trying to keep farms sustainable and assist farmers with farm plans and to help find ways to improve the economics of their farming operation. Pierce County has developed an action plan based on what farmers identified as what they need. The effort is to keep lands in open space and maintaining the viability of working agricultural and forest lands are critical. Much of the farmland in Pierce County has been lost and agriculture, particularly around the urban fringe, is under constant pressure. Pierce County recognizes the declining nature of agriculture and wants to work with the conservation district to address these issues.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Monty Mahan, Pierce Conservation District; John Larson, Washington Association of Conservation Districts; Sara Hemphill, King Conservation District; George Walk, Pierce County; Ryan Mellow, Cascade Land Conservancy.